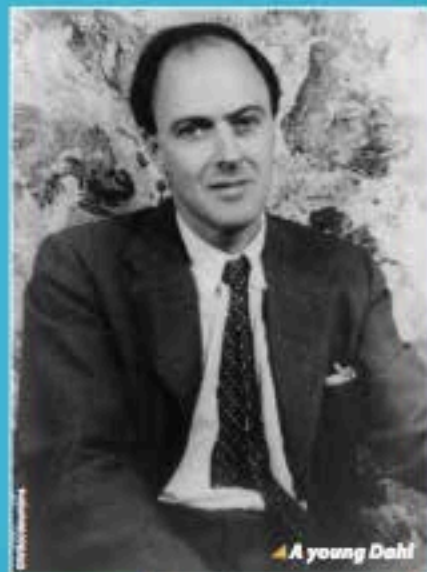


When BFG came to Dar

Children's author was inspired by his years in East Africa .

Much has been made of his Welsh and Norwegian roots, but not so many people seem to know that author Roald Dahl, creator of the Big Friendly Giant and other classic characters, once lived in Dar es Salaam.

Dahl was posted there in the 1930s by Shell Oil and lived in a grand house leased by the company. In spite of his middle management status, he would have had a cook, a housekeeper and a car with a driver.



A young Dahl

Every day, on his way to work, he passed a cement plant with spewing chimneys that was to be the inspiration, 30-odd years later, for Charlie and the Chocolate Factory.

Today, Dar is, of course, a modern city, typically used by tourists as a staging point on their way to somewhere else. But hidden among the skyscrapers and dull concrete blocks are older historical buildings and attractions that would have been well known to Dahl.

Dar es Salaam was a sleepy fishing village of just 60,000 residents when Dahl was posted there in 1934. He

worked in Dar until the war broke out in 1939. Now it's a major city and port that could reach 'megacity' status with over 10 million inhabitants by the early 2030s.

Landmark

But it has not always been so. It was in 1887, after years of stagnation, that Dar received an economic boost when the German East Africa company established a station here. A landmark that would have been familiar to Dahl is the Azania Front Lutheran Church, built on the waterfront by German missionaries in 1898. Dahl wasn't religious,

so he's unlikely to have taken part in a service there, but the Gothic interior is wonderful, and I like to think he would at least have had a peep inside. Now backed by tall buildings and modern skyscrapers, the church is still in use and its choir can be heard from the street outside. Another landmark, just west of here, is St Joseph's Cathedral, built at the same time, with its distinctive spire and superb stained glass.

Dahl lived farther north, outside the centre, and would have been driven to work. The roads were unpaved in those days and the journey would have been a pleasant

The BFG Not scary

Dar es Salaam was a sleepy fishing village of just 60,000 residents when Dahl was posted there in 1934





Up, up and away...

Among his many other accomplishments, Roald Dahl became a wartime fighter pilot with the Royal Air Force, which he joined in November 1939, doing his initial training in East Africa.

After a 965 km drive from Dar to Nairobi, he was accepted for fighter training in a de Havilland Tiger Moth biplane. On training flights, he enjoyed watching the wildlife of Kenya.

He continued to advanced training near Baghdad and was commissioned as a pilot officer in August 1940.

one. He worked in a smart area downtown, near where the ambassador's residences are today. Nearby is the Gymkhana Golf Course built in 1926 to accommodate the growing expatriate population. The course has sweeping views of the Indian Ocean. Not far away are the Botanical Gardens on Samora Avenue, established by the Germans in 1893. Initially developed as a seed bank and cash crop testing facility, the gardens grew into a soothing respite for the public to enjoy. Dahl may well have come here to sit in the shade and read.

Sprawling

Naturally enough, Dar is an equatorial city and even in Dahl's time the hot, humid climate prompted wealthier residents to move near the coast, with its cooling sea breezes, or at least away from the built-up areas. With no air conditioning, just rudimentary fans, it was important to have high ceilings and outdoor space, usually a veranda, so there was no option but to move out of the city centre. Today as we know, this pattern is still followed and most residents live in the suburbs. Oyster Bay has

to serve the increasingly cosmopolitan residents. The Cape Town Fish Market restaurant is a case in point. Even on a Tuesday night it's likely to be a busy scene.

Stand-alone restaurants would have been thin on the ground in Roald Dahl's time. There were a few hotels with restaurants where he would probably have dined. The Kaiserhof, behind the Lutheran church, was built in 1906. It changed its name when the British took over the New Africa Hotel and was extended. Dahl would probably have chosen from a simple menu, in line with the conservative European tastes of the day, but making the most of the fish market nearby.

The oldest building in Dar es Salaam is the Old Boma, built in 1866 by the Sultan of Zanzibar. In a styling unique to Zanzibar, it has coral-stone walls and a carved door. Dahl would have known about this building, which was renovated and extended by the Germans. In 1979, along with other historical buildings, it was scheduled for demolition. But Walter Byoya, who ran a nearby publishing house, took the authorities to court and won an injunction. In 2014 the

Dar is a sprawling city and even in Dahl's time the hot, humid climate prompted wealthier residents to move near the coast

always been popular. The yacht club, built in 1933, is more evidence of the city's growing number of wealthy residents. More recently, the area west of the peninsula, at the meeting point of the Masaki and Msasani districts, has seen a rise in good restaurants and bars, such as those around the Slipway Shopping Centre,

Dar es Salaam Centre for Architectural Heritage (DARCH) was set up here with funding from the European Union. It is hoped that protection of the buildings will continue under their stewardship and that historical buildings – including those known to Roald Dahl – will be preserved for generations to come.

